

A reassignment of *Trochalopteron (erythrocephalus) woodi*

In revising the highly variable *Garrulax* [*Trochalopteron*] *erythrocephalus* complex, Collar (2006) allocated the form *woodi*, with some uncertainty, to the newly restricted species *G. [T.] erythrocephalus*, but in Collar & Robson (2007) *woodi* was reassigned, without explanation, to *G. [T.] chrysopterus*. This was because, on reconsidering the specimen evidence, geographical relationships and a newly described taxon, *ailaoshanensis* from central Yunnan, it was felt that *woodi* more appropriately fits with the taxa in *chrysopterus* (absence of black on throat, plain silvery ear-covert pattern, dirty olive shade to scapulars and lower back). In reality, however, the taxa in the *erythrocephalus* complex between and including Assam and Yunnan need considerably more study in order to arrive at a more definitive judgement about their separability into two species. I suggest maintaining the status quo of Collar & Robson (2007) for the time being, but accept this is very likely to change.

An island range extension for *Robsonius sorsogonensis*

During a visit to PNM in April 2007 I found that one (register no. 16656) of three specimens there of Grey-banded Babbler *R. sorsogonensis* (formerly *Napothera rabori*; see Collar 2006, Collar & Robson 2007) was collected by P. C. Gonzales at 'camp 1' on the island of Catanduanes on 6 March 1988. Despite Gonzales's co-authorship of Kennedy *et al.* (2000), this notable record is omitted from that work. It is, however, difficult to imagine that the label is erroneous in the provenance it gives, so Catanduanes appears in the range for the species, previously known only from Luzon, in Collar & Robson (2007). Nothing in the plumage or morphometrics of this specimen, a male, suggests geographical variation.

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N. J. COLLAR, BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK, and Bird Group, Natural History Museum, Akeman Street, Tring, Herts HP23 6AP, U.K. Email nigel.collar@birdlife.org

Eating aliens: diet of the Grey-headed Fish-eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* in Singapore

DING LI YONG

Introduction

Three species of large piscivorous raptors (family Accipitridae) are resident in the Thai-Malay Peninsula (Wells 1999). The genus *Ichthyophaga* is represented by two closely related and similar-looking species (Grey-headed Fish-eagle *I. ichthyaetus*, Lesser Fish-eagle *I. humilis*), both of which occur by large forested rivers and lakes (Wells 1999), sometimes sympatrically, and also exhibiting similar distributions across tropical South and South-East Asia (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). Both species were historically known to occur on Singapore Island, but there are no recent records of the Lesser Fish-eagle *I. humilis* and it is currently considered locally extinct (Gibson-Hill 1950, Lim 2009). The Grey-headed Fish-eagle *I. ichthyaetus* presently occurs on a number of Singapore's inland and coastal reservoirs, but its population is presumed to be small and suspected to be in decline; therefore it is considered 'critically endangered' in the Red Data Book of Singapore (Davison *et al.* 2008, Lim 2009). Globally, it is listed as Near Threatened on basis of a

declining population due to habitat loss and degradation across its range (Tingay *et al.* 2006, Birdlife International 2011).

The Grey-headed Fish-eagle is ecologically sympatric with the widespread White-bellied Fish-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* in Singapore. On Singapore's inland reservoirs, there is much evidence of ecological overlap, leading to direct competition between the two species in diet and possibly nesting sites (Lee T. K. *in litt.* 2009). Compared to the White-bellied Fish-eagle, the distribution of the Grey-headed Fish-eagle is more restricted, with relatively fewer records from coastal areas. Most records of Grey-headed Fish-eagles originate from inland reservoirs within the Central Catchment Nature Reserve (CCNR), Singapore's largest protected area, and from flooded, disused quarries (e.g. Bukit Gombak). Few recent records are from coastal reservoirs (e.g. Kranji, Sarimbun, Serangoon) and mangrove swamps (e.g. Sungei Buloh) (see Wang & Hails 2008, Lim 2009).

Despite the ease of observations owing to their conspicuousness and the accessibility of many local sites (e.g. reservoir parks), a review

of the published literature showed that no prior attempts have been made in Singapore or Peninsular Malaysia to study the diet of this species or other resident piscivorous raptors in detail, and Wells (1999) only generically mentions that the species consumes ‘large fish’. Here I document prey items identified from the diet of three Grey-headed Fish-eagles in Singapore and suggest that the proliferation of alien fish species in Singapore’s water bodies may in fact be benefiting the species and encouraging its local spread.

Observations and discussion

From 2009 to 2011, I collected information on the prey items of Grey-headed Fish-eagles observed at three widely separated locations (Figure 1) through field surveys, and hence probably representing three different individuals in their respective territories. Where birds were seen with prey items, photographs or video stills were taken for visual identification using relevant literature (e.g. Kottelat *et al.* 1993, Ng & Tan 2010), which were then confirmed by expert opinion (Lim K.K.P. *in litt.* 2011). Two of the locations, the Upper Seletar and MacRitchie Reservoirs, are large man-made inland reservoirs fringed largely by young to tall secondary lowland forest (over 90 years old), and remnant patches of primary forest. The third site, Bukit Gombak quarry, is a small flooded quarry surrounded at its fringes by secondary scrub dominated by simpoh air *Dillenia suffruticosa*, non-native albizia *Paraserianthes falcataria*, acacia *Acacia auriculiformis*, and open grassy areas adjacent to an urban residential area.

A total of six different prey items were identified, including at least five different fish species and one species of reptile (Table 1). Of the fish species, four have alien origins and were not part of the

original fish fauna (Baker & Lim 2008, Ng & Tan 2010). While information on the origins of these fish species is anecdotal, field evidence indicate that these have established populations in many of the large water bodies in Singapore. Some are likely to have been introduced as food fish (e.g. *Pangasius nasutus*, *Pangasius* sp.1) while others were deliberately introduced for sport fishing (e.g. *Cichla orinocensis*) or are established populations of released, breeding individuals from the pet trade (e.g. *Geophagus altifrons*).

Given the near-absence of historical records (see Gibson-Hill 1950, Lim 2009), present evidence suggests that the Grey-headed Fish-eagle population in Singapore is increasing, for a number of likely reasons. Ironically, one is the ready availability of prey items in Singapore’s inland and coastal reservoirs, especially large fish, many of which have been introduced into reservoirs (e.g. *Channa micropeltes*) (Ng & Tan 2010). My observations identified four alien fish species in the Grey-headed Fish-eagle’s diet. Two are large-bodied cichlids of South American origin, *Geophagus altifrons* and *Cichla orinocensis*, while the others, *Pangasius nasutus* and *Pangasius* sp.1 are large-bodied catfish of South-East Asian origins (Lim K.K.P. *in litt.* 2011). My limited observations are indicative that alien fish species, which are common in Singapore’s reservoirs (Ng & Tan 2010), form a regular and possibly even dominant component of their diet. Other common large alien fish species occurring (e.g. *Channa micropeltes*, *Oreochromis mossambicus*), whilst as yet undocumented, are very likely to be prey. Furthermore, non-fish prey has also been documented, and one fish-eagle was seen taking a young Malayan water monitor *Varanus salvator* (Remahl 2008). In Cambodia, Tingay *et al.* (2006) reported watersnakes as regular prey items, but this has not been documented in Singapore, although it is likely given the abundance of some homalopsine species (e.g. *Cerberus rynchops*).

The Grey-headed Fish-eagle’s ability to forage in waterbodies near urban areas (Table 1), tolerate heavily degraded habitats such as young secondary scrub dominated by non-native trees (a widespread habitat in Singapore), and feed on possibly abundant alien prey species suggests that a trend of population increase in the short term is highly likely. An unexpected yet potentially beneficial ecological consequence of this is a natural population check on the populations of some alien fish species (e.g. *Geophagus* sp.) in reservoirs, while allowing the fish fauna in Singapore’s reservoirs to be sampled at the same time. On present evidence, I recommend that a revised threat status of ‘nationally vulnerable’ might more accurately reflect the current status of the Grey-headed Fish-eagle in Singapore. However, large predators in general are good indicators of environmental conditions (Sergio *et al.* 2008), and thus a close monitoring of present and future population trends of this raptor is necessary. Lastly, a species such as the Grey-headed Fish-eagle, being large, charismatic and easily identifiable by the public, has excellent public appeal which will aid its long-term conservation.

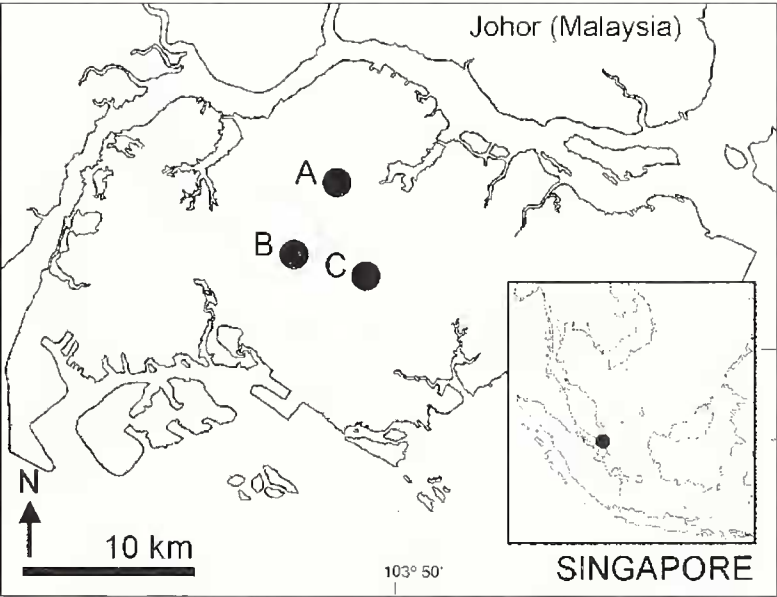


Figure 1. Localities of observation sites in Singapore. Inset: location of Singapore in South-East Asia; A: Upper Seletar Reservoir; B: Bukit Gombak quarry; C: MacRitchie Reservoir.

Table 1. Observed prey items of Grey-headed Fish-eagle in Singapore. All prey was identifiable up to genus level at least.

Species	Local status	Possible reason for introduction	Location	Coordinates	Vegetation
Fish					
<i>Channa striatus</i>	Native	—	Bukit Gombak	1°21'25N 103°45'20E	Young secondary forest
<i>Pangasius nasutus</i>	Non-native	human food	Bukit Gombak	1°21'25N 103°45'20E	Young secondary forest
<i>Pangasius</i> sp. 1	Non-native	human food	MacRitchie	1°20'38N 103°49'10E	Tall secondary forest
<i>Cichla arinacensis</i>	Non-native	sport fishing	Upper Seletar	1°24'21N 103°47'17E	Parkland, scrub
<i>Geophagus altifrans</i>	Non-native	pet trade	MacRitchie	1°20'38N 103°49'10E	Tall secondary forest
Reptiles					
<i>Varanus salvatar</i>	Native	—	Bukit Gombak	1°21'25N 103°45'20E	Young secondary forest

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Ding Li YONG, Nature Society (Singapore), 510 Geylang Road, The Sunflower #02-05 Singapore 38946. Email: zoothera@yahoo.com

Status of Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* in Bangladesh

ALEXANDER C. LEES, JEREMY P. BIRD, SAYAM U. CHOWDHURY & ROBERT W. MARTIN

Bangladesh remains one of the least heavily ornithologically inventoried countries in Asia, although this situation is now being reversed by a growing band of experienced local ornithologists under the auspices of the Bangladesh Bird Club and other organisations. JPB, ACL and RM spent most of March 2010 in coastal regions of Bangladesh undertaking an extensive survey for wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* (Bird *et al.* 2010).

Between 16 and 19 March SUC, RM, JPB and ACL surveyed intertidal habitats around the Feni River estuary in the extreme north-east of the Bay of Bengal. On the evening of 17 March JPB and ACL were making their way back to the road across coastal grazing marshes at Char Fakura (22°47'N 91°21'E) when ACL found two Red-throated Pipits *Anthus cervinus* (images available on request) creeping through cattle pasture. The two observers were afforded prolonged views of the two birds (one of which was in adult-type plumage with a rusty-red breast and face). Aware that the species has rarely been recorded in Bangladesh, ACL obtained a number of digiscoped images to document the event. The birds were not associating with any other species although a single Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseatus*, five Richard's Pipits *A. richardi*, 10 Oriental Skylarks *Alauda gulgula* and 150 Pacific Golden Plovers *Pluvialis fulva* were present in the vicinity. ACL returned to the site after summoning SUC but the observers only managed to obtain brief flight views of the two birds.

The following day RM, JPB and ACL visited Char Chandia (22°48'N 91°24'E) and encountered another 15 Red-throated Pipits associated with a large flock of 350 'Eastern' Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla [flava] tschutschensis* and 80 Short-toed Larks *Calandrellabrachydactyla*, with smaller numbers of Citrine Wagtails *M. citreola*, Oriental Skylarks, Richard's Pipits and Pacific Golden and Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* also present in the same fields.

Identification A small, compact, relatively short-tailed pipit about the same size as Olive-backed Pipit *A. hodgsoni*. Winter-plumaged individuals were relatively nondescript: creamy-buff/-white underparts with dark streaks and quite heavily streaked buff-and-

black mantle, a streaked rump and crown. Although the first two individuals were located visually, many subsequent individuals were detected by the species's distinctive call, a squeaky, drawn-out *psssih*. Separation from other similar birds was relatively straightforward, the chief confusion species present in the region being Rosy Pipit. The two are separable at all times of year by Red-throated's short thin bill with a pale yellow base, as opposed to the robust, all-dark bill of Rosy Pipit; the narrower supercilium and pale lores of Red-throated Pipit, in contrast to Rosy's longer, more prominent supercilium with a 'drop' at the rear. The mantle of Red-throated Pipit was less heavily streaked than those of western populations with which we were familiar (see Alström & Mild 2003) and consequently more similar to Rosy Pipit, which is a more 'heavily built' bird overall. The summer-plumaged birds differed from summer-plumaged Rosy Pipits in their reddish (rather than pale pink) throat, upper breast and supercilium.

Behaviour The choice of habitat is typical for Red-throated Pipits, which preferentially forage in areas of short turf browsed by ungulates and, as here, often form mixed assemblages with *flava* wagtails (Cramp 1988, Alström & Mild 2003, pers. obs.) The birds typically foraged singly, presumably to avoid competition with both conspecifics and allospecifics. On several occasions they were observed feeding on larval insects, apparently crane fly larvae (family Tipulidae), which have previously been recorded as an important item in the species's diet from both breeding and wintering areas (Cramp 1988).

Status in Bangladesh Although considered likely to occur by Rashid (1967), there are just four previous published records of Red-throated Pipit from Bangladesh (totalling eight individuals), all recorded during wetland surveys in the north-eastern haors during February–March 1992 (Thompson *et al.* 1994). Considering the abundance of suitable habitat in the delta region and the ubiquity of migrant flocks of *flava* wagtails, the 17 individuals we found may well represent the 'tip of an iceberg' of the number of individuals potentially passing through the region. Our records suggest that the Feni River delta may be a regionally important wintering or